

To the Partners for Resilience 'Learning from and about PfR' study

Summary

Programme and context

The overall aim of Partners for Resilience programme is to reduce the impact of natural hazards on the lives and livelihoods of vulnerable communities. The alliance is made-up of five NL-based core partners: the Netherlands Red Cross (alliance lead), CARE Nederland, Cordaid, the Red Cross /Red Crescent Climate Centre, and Wetlands International; the network comprises of over 60 civil society organisations in 9 countries.

The Partners apply and promote the integration of Disaster Risk Reduction, Climate Change Adaptation and Ecosystem Management and Restoration (increasingly referred to as 'Integrated Risk Management') to mitigate disaster risk and enhance livelihoods. The programme partners apply three strategies: they strengthen the resilience of communities at the local level, build capacity of (partner) CSO's to assist communities and advocate for the approach to other stakeholders, and influence governments to ensure conducive policies and budgets for integrated risk management.

The PfR programme was implemented between 2011 and 2015 in nine countries: Ethiopia, Guatemala, India, Indonesia, Kenya, Mali, Nicaragua, Philippines and Uganda. Additionally initiatives were taken at a global level.

Purpose of evaluation

The findings of the qualitative study are expected to enable PfR to promote its longer-term goals of (1) mainstreaming the approach within the (PfR partner/ humanitarian) organisations, and (2) influencing policy formulation related to DRR, CCA and ecosystem management at local, regional and (inter)national levels; with the aim to make communities more resilient in the face of increasing disaster risks. In addition, this evaluation will be valuable and informative for the management and set up of PfR 2016-2020.

The purpose of the study is three-fold:

- **Assess the relevance** of PfR approach (the programme and the integrated approach) towards building resilience.
- **Provide empirical evidence** about the contribution of PfR's approach to enhancing the resilience of local communities.
- **Provide insights into the institutional and technical dynamics of implementing PfR's approach** in the context of specific partners working in specific communities with their own social and economic make-up, political properties and community organisations.

Observations regarding the report

The researchers and report writers have assessed a very complex programme. The report is detailed, particularly on operational issues. Generally, the team has done a good job at pulling out the strengths and weaknesses of

the programme in the conclusions of the report. The findings and recommendations in the report have informed the development of PfR 2016-2020.

PfR wishes to emphasise that, for various reasons, the research does not comprise all programme countries. Therefore, although all findings are regarded highly relevant, PfR wishes to note that these cannot be applied to the full programme. Also the research has been carried out and concluded before the finalization of the programme, and thus before all results had become visible:

- 562,000 community members covered by risk reduction plans because of PfR, and 114,000 community members adapted their livelihoods
- 3,458 staff were trained on Integrated Risk Management
- 98 partners and risk committees, many created together with PfR, established contacts with meteorological offices and knowledge institutes
- 327 government institutions were reached with targeted policy dialogues on IRM

Finally PfR believes that, where a deeper assessment would have been done by several of the country researchers, more findings could have been added, and some findings would have been more thoroughly substantiated.

Main findings and follow-up

PfR wishes to add its reaction to the research team's key findings and recommendations, explicating how these will be followed-up. Some issues raised in the report need more dialogue and attention and will therefore be further discussed during the course of the PfR 2016-2020, PfR's successor programme cycle.

1. *Finding:* The resilience approach is relevant for its integrated nature and the focus on communities, yet risks to background the structural causes of vulnerability and the rights-base of populations to be protected by their government.

Recommendation: PfR ties its resilience approach more explicitly to vulnerability and rights-based approaches.

Reaction and follow-up: With the integrated approach being the core of the programmatic approach, and the community its main focus, PfR welcomes the apparent relevance of these. At the same time PfR considers tackling the root causes of vulnerability also an important element in its programme. Especially for the Red Cross, being traditionally more response and preparedness oriented, this constituted a shift that took time and effort to accomplish. The PfR alliance members have generally applied a needs-based approach to tackle these root causes. It is believed that, particularly for the Red Cross, rights-based dominated dialogues with governments could compromise the organisation's special status with key decision makers and thus jeopardise access to vulnerable people also for the other alliance members. Structural causes of vulnerability, such as poverty, poor governance, inequality and inadequate access to resources can be tackled through both approaches, although the rationale and the strategy to address these issues might be different. In the PfR 2016-2020 programme, the dialogues on the application of the integrated approach, pursued through Humanitarian Diplomacy that is based on a needs-based approach, will be the key strategy, based on the recognition that this renders a focus on underlying causes of poverty and vulnerability a central consideration..

2. *Finding:* Most successful were activities that combine DRR, EMR and CCA with tangible livelihood projects.

Recommendation: PfR maximizes the possibilities to incorporate tangible livelihood projects in its programmes.

Reaction and follow-up: PfR welcomes this finding and aims to apply this combination in further programming. The alliance also aims to incorporate insights into existing tools and guides, such as the community resilience

checklist and the sustainability checklist. The alliance members and their partners will also promote that sustainable livelihoods are key in addressing underlying root causes of vulnerability, as part of the PfR 2016-2020. They aim to find additional match funding for livelihood related activities to complement the new financing facility from the Dutch government that focuses exclusively on strengthening capacities of partners in lobby and advocacy.

3. *Finding:* The PfR approach is highly relevant to communities and stakeholders, yet the framing of the approach is complex (many principles, building blocks, dimensions), also because of the (artificial) separation of domains and time-frames.

Recommendation: PfR revisits and simplifies its frame, and reduces the emphasis on matches between domains and mandates of alliance partners.

Reaction and follow up: PfR is pleased with the recognition of the relevance of integrating DRR, CCA and EMR in its work with communities and stakeholders, since both the integrative approach and the community focus are the backbone of the programme. The PfR 2016-2020 programme will build on the efforts and experience of the Partners for Resilience programme, underlining the witnessed relevance. As this programme aims to build capacity of CSOs to engage in dialogues for integrated risk management, one important element is to ensure the integrated risk management approach is clear to relevant stakeholders. The PfR 2016-2020 programme provides the opportunity to discuss the integrated risk management approach in detail among the Netherlands-based alliance partners and during in-country workshops. Conceptual frameworks and practice will be further clarified and discussed to ensure the approach and key messages are clear to partners and stakeholders. Presenting and explaining the PfR mission and vision document at the outset of the PfR 2016-2020 will be a first step in this process.

PfR recognises that taking-up Climate Change and Ecosystem aspects was regarded as complex, and many partners expressed a desire for more intensive and targeted support throughout the programme in these fields. Due to limited resources however, the support has been provided through structures that were not (Red Cross Climate Centre) or not in all cases (Wetlands International) in-country, by means of workshops and the promotion of standards and approaches. PfR recognises that in the successor programme it needs to allocate dedicated resources closer to the levels where the demand for support is expressed and made higher budgetary allocation for Climate Change and Ecosystem aspects for that purpose.

4. *Finding:* It is a strong suit of PfR to build on existing community structures with the caveat that this risks reproducing existing inequalities.

Recommendation: PfR needs to emphasize inclusion in its programmes and monitor and address problems of inclusion and exclusion at community level.

Reaction and follow-up: The finding reaffirms PfR's conviction that rootedness in communities should be the basis for strengthening resilience, and that its approach has demonstrated the ability to work with and through these local structures. The alliance also agrees with the expressed risk of reproducing existing inequalities, and sees it as an important recommendation. At the same time however partners have targeted specific vulnerable groups, and applied dedicated policies, stemming from their international networks, especially in relation to gender. It recognises however that in reality, inclusion is also often related to the skills and efforts of a facilitator/volunteer at field level and the partner organisation(s) he/she cooperates with. Therefore PfR will pay particular attention in its work to these issues, for example during monitoring visits, and seek to critically assess inclusion and exclusion and see how this can be improved.

5. *Finding:* The PfR approach is complex in its incorporation of many stakeholders in programming. As a result, there was a long inception phase, and 5 years appears to be a short time-frame for such a complex programme.

Recommendation: PfR ensures in the next phase to build on and consolidate achievements of the first phase. From the start it takes a more participatory approach with the country teams and makes clear country specific agreements on a modus operandi.

Reaction and follow-up: PfR is aware that a partnership with many stakeholders is complex and that it takes times and resources to reach results. On the other hand, the long start-up phase has generated many lessons for the PfR 2016-2020, including the above. Several working groups with representatives from all partners, also in-country staff, are currently developing programmes and plans for PfR's Strategic Partnership programme 2016-2020. Building on their experience they will develop effective processes and mechanisms for example for governance (including co-operation mechanisms and greater involvement of senior management of implementing partners); Planning, Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning (including structures to systematically generate and apply lessons learned); finance (especially facilitating implementation of joint activities).

6. *Finding:* Coordination has appeared to be a key factor in the success of PfR.

Recommendation: PfR ensures that country-level coordinators are available full-time and capable to act independent of the different alliance partners.

Reaction and follow-up: This finding confirms PfR's managerial structure that provides full-time availability and capacity of lead positions at country level. However, given that staff is always employed by one of the partner organizations and country leads always risk to be perceived as favoring one organization over the other. One way to tackle this is to ensure that all team members and their motivations are heard, to be transparent about decision-making and keep in mind how activities and decisions will lead to the set goals and outcomes and to explore more participatory approaches to shape plans for joint activities. Also the above (Finding 5) mentioned governance structure will likely contribute to prevent a notion of favouritism, and global structures will also need to see to that.

7. *Finding:* The emphasis PfR put on learning throughout the program was strongly valued on all levels and by all partners, however more could have been reached.

Recommendation: PfR maintains a focus on learning and from the beginning includes country specific learning plans.

Reaction and follow-up: All partners value learning and know that an evidence base is a first step towards effective dialogues with stakeholders, and consider learning essential to ensure strategies are well-geared towards achieving the programme's goals. As results became clear towards the end of the programme, much documentation and learning activities took place in the programme's final year. PfR welcomes the recognition of its targeted initiatives in this field. Therefore the PMEL working group will discuss this aspect and develop a learning strategy and plan for its 2016-2020 programme, including guidelines for country specific learning plans, that feed into a global learning agenda. The programme will also seek collaboration with learning initiatives of other programmes that have a similar focus.

8. *Finding:* Local government often lacks power to enable community resilience.

Recommendation: PfR incorporates the issue of local government in lobby and advocacy and rethinks the expectations invested in local government that underpin its approach.

Reaction and follow-up: In the PfR 2016-2020 programme, country teams will formulate their plans based on a solid analysis of stakeholders and power relations. Lessons learnt from the previous programme cycle and this analysis will feed the lobby and advocacy strategy towards relevant stakeholders. The partners will see to it that these strategies are relevant and effective and will be adapted if necessary. As much as possible the capacities of local governments and community groups will be built jointly and simultaneously, in

correspondence with recommendations of various international agreements like Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction, the Sustainable Development Goals, and the Paris Climate Agreement.

9. *Finding:* National government turns out to be a powerful actor in the enabling environment of communities and trickling-up of the PfR approach from local to national government has not been realised.

Recommendation: PfR steps up its efforts to engage in dialogue with national governments to enhance enabling policies and programmes for resilience.

Reaction and follow-up: PfR recognizes that targeting the national government is an important step in shaping an enabling environment to enhance resilience. It also agrees that in most PfR countries more emphasis has been put at local level engagement. In general terms PfR feels it is important to ensure that for each goal, the right level is targeted, either local or national. In the PfR 2016-2020 programme there will be ample opportunities to increase further engagement with different government levels, including the national level. Partners will decide at which level to engage with whom, based on a problem, stakeholder and power analysis and experiences from PfR 2011-2015. Due consideration will be given to the opportunities that national governments provide to create an enabling environment, of which consequently also dialogues at subnational levels will benefit.